



Shadow

Karin Alvtegen , McKinley Burnett (Translator)

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In a nondescript apartment block in Stockholm, most of the residents are elderly. Usually a death is a sad but straightforward event. But sometimes a resident will die and there are no friends or family to contact. This is when Marianne Folkesson arrives, employed by the state to close up a life with dignity and respect. Gerda Persson has lain dead in her apartment for three days before Marianne is called. When she arrives, she finds the apartment tidy and ordered. Gerda's life seems to have been quite ordinary. Until Marianne opens the freezer and finds it full of books, neatly stacked and wrapped in clingfilm, a thick layer of ice covering them. They are all by Axel Ragnerfeldt, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, with handwritten dedications to Gerda from the author. What story do these books have to tell, about Gerda, and more importantly about Ragnerfeldt, a man whose fame is without precedent in the nation's cultural life, but seldom gives interviews?

Shadow Details

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From Reader Review *Shadow* for online ebook

Holly says

From *Belletrista*: A child of four is found abandoned in an amusement park with little more than some crumbs, an empty juice bottle, a tape recorder, and a Bambi book by his side. There's also a note: "Take care of this child. Forgive me." Thus, one is drawn into this neatly crafted novel, which keeps one rapt as layer upon layer is slowly and deftly revealed.

Some 30 years later, Gerda Persson's body is found three days after she has died at the age of 92, with no clue as to who she is. Astonishingly, her freezer yields a neatly sealed load of books by the Nobel laureate and national treasure, Axel Ragnerfeldt. On closer inspection, each book reveals a personal, handwritten inscription by the celebrated author to Gerda. What is the connection between Gerda Persson, Axel Ragnerfeldt, and the foundling?

This novel fits the crime and psychological thriller genre, but has no detective or investigator. The tale unfolds via the voices of Axel (interesting name, as everything revolves around him), his wife, son, housekeeper, and a couple of other key role players, including Kristoffer Sandeblom, a man in his thirties in search of his roots. As we glimpse each character's mindset and life experience, the story builds up gradually and compellingly revealing a picture of secrecy, deceit, crime and murder.

This is a dark book with very little light and many shadows. The biggest is arguably Ragnerfeldt's tour-de-force *Shadow*, which swayed the Nobel in his favour. The bright glow of this man's prominence casts a heavy shadow on all the people in his life, including his wife, the members of his family, friends, and even fellow-writers.

Axel Ragnerfeldt has climbed the ladder of success, but at what price? His bid for fame as a writer has left a set of disillusioned, embittered and pained individuals in its wake. Though the world adores him and looks up to him, he heads a deeply unhappy and dysfunctional family. At its core, the novel delves into the ramifications of accomplishment: What lengths are we prepared to go to ensure worldly success? And are all the sacrifices worth it, at the end of the day?

Karin Alvtegen is one of Sweden's popular writers, and *Shadow* won the Danish Best Crime Novel of the Year award and was shortlisted for the Swedish Academy of Crime Writer's Award. This is a quick, engaging read that abounds with revelations of dark secrets and intrigue, and keeps one spellbound until its inevitable and brilliant denouement.

John says

I've thoroughly enjoyed the three previous Alvtegen novels I've read, to the extent that I have her at the top of my own personal list of Scandi crime writers (perhaps because, in her case, the term "crime writer" is a bit of a misnomer), but with *Shadow* I think she's surpassed herself.

The elderly Gerda Persson dies alone, and a state official, Marianne Folkesson, is sent in to sort out Gerda's affairs and possessions, and to see if there are any surviving relatives and friends. What she discovers is that

Gerda was for a long time the housekeeper to the Nobel laureate Axel Ragnerfeldt, widely regarded as Sweden's greatest and most popular novelist. Soon she finds out, too, that Gerda has willed her modest fortune to a failing writer called Kristoffer Sandebloom whom it appears she never met.

Marianne herself doesn't, during the novel, unravel the riddle of what's been going on; the final paragraphs indicate to us that she's just about to do so, and to blow the whole charade apart. But what she does do is, through her inquiries, set in course a series of actions that, in conjunction with very extensive flashbacks, reveal to us, as per the peeling back of the layers of the onion, the deceptions and worse crimes that the Ragnerfeldt family have been covering up for years and in some cases for decades. Some of those secrets are predictable (Alvtegen always plays fair with us) while others are more unexpected; in this respect I was reminded, although the two books are in most other respects quite different, of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, another borderline melodrama.

Throughout the book Alvtegen is in complete control of her material, and it's this, along with the fact that the book's heart lies among the lives of various writers, that made *Shadow* such an immensely satisfying book for me. Highly recommended.

Fictionophile says

The single most positive aspect of this novel is the beautifully written prose. The words seem to speak directly to the reader in a heart-touching and sometimes heart-wrenching way.

I'll admit this is one of those novels where the cover art drew me in. Who can resist an adorable little boy? Then I read the blurb at the back which told me that this little boy was abandoned and was somehow connected to the death thirty five years later of a 92 year old woman who had books in her freezer upon her death... That was enough to capture the attention of any bibliophile. Too old to be the boy's mother, how could this woman be connected to him?

The novel was a mystery, but not written in the traditional way. In fact the reader does not really know what the crime(s) were until close to the end of the book. When the circumstances are revealed it left me both disturbed and profoundly moved.

Set in Stockholm, the novel followed the life and family of Axel Ragnerfeldt, a famous and Nobel Prize winning novelist. (the author of the books in the freezer). The novel poses the question: How much is glory and fame really worth, when counted in the suffering of the people closest to you? His family were portrayed with such depth and empathy that the reader felt their hopelessness. The claustrophobic family ties, mysterious disappearances and dark secrets surrounding a man shrouded in myth were portrayed with an honesty and brutality that spoke of deep understanding. The theme of how the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children is not a new one, but Alvtegen's prose brought the theme home to me like no other book ever has. "No matter whether your action is evil or good, it spreads like rings on the water. Over vast expanses it will travel, finding ever new paths. That is why your influence is infinite, and also your guilt."

"Shadow" is the first novel I've read by Karin Alvtegen and I will read as many more as I can get hold of. That being said, this novel was not exactly uplifting. In fact I would go as far as to say that anyone suffering from seasonal affective disorder should not read this book in the winter. The overall tone was bleak and melancholy. To quote the novel's description on the author's website, "her darkest and most complex thriller to date, in which the disturbing truth of a sick family is gradually and mercilessly laid bare." Highly recommended.

Marsha says

Such a dark novel.

How does the death of an old woman connect to a child abandoned in an amusement park decades ago? And how will their connection ruin an elderly Nobel prize winning author's family and reputation?

I love this author's ability to take the reader inside each character's head. Seeing the outer actions versus the inner thoughts is so compelling. Seeing how each person's perspective of events collides with other realities is illuminating in itself. Makes one wonder what filters we all have up. But in the novel the mixture of all these disparate realities is what makes the grim thriller.

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Maria João Fernandes says

"One always has a choice. After that it's a whole matter as to what takes priority."

Um livro envolvente que nos conta a história de quatro gerações de uma família - os Ragnerfeldt. Karin Alvtegen desvenda os segredos e os laços que unem os maridos, as esposas, os pais e os filhos, as rivalidades profissionais entre amigos e as relações entre patrões e empregados.

"Shadow" é o nome do último livro do patriarca da família Ragnerfeldt, um homem poderoso que vivência a decadência dos últimos anos da sua vida. Numa família marcada pela criatividade, expressão e amor pela escrita, o papel do autor e o seu trabalho são destacados.

Um romance poderoso que torna muito difícil fazer pausas durante a leitura. Foi através das personagens reais, com sentimentos quase palpáveis e atitudes humanas, que vivi acontecimentos trágicos, apaixonantes e marcantes, que vão muito além da compreensão das pessoas que os vivem. Como espetadora, senti alegria, medo, esperança, desilusão e tristeza. A escritora sueca não nos deixa de fora do seu enredo, muito pelo contrário, torna-nos uma parte integrante, ainda que silenciosa.

"Shadow" é um livro com muitas camadas, que nos leva numa viagem profunda sobre adaptação social e biológica da consciência humana. Mais do que um retrato de relações familiares e experiências relativas ao processo de escrita criativa, com eventos históricos com palco principal, este livro caracteriza maravilhosamente a amizade, a traição, a paixão, a raiva, a lealdade, o poder, o respeito, a esperança, a ambição, os sonhos, a solidão e todo um espectro de emoções e sentimentos.

As personagens, principais e secundárias, são detalhadamente apresentadas. Sentindo ou não simpatia por

elas, sendo pessoas melhores ou piores, todas têm a mesma oportunidade de contar a história pelas suas palavras e apresentar o seu ponto de vista.

Kristoffer está numa busca permanente pelo significado da sua existência; Halina luta, desde que se lembra, para curar as feridas deixadas por um passado horrível; Louise esforça-se por ultrapassar a sua dependência num homem que nunca a amou; Axel apercebe-se do medo da morte. O enredo é inteligente, complexo, surpreendente e realista.

A narrativa intercala o passado com o presente, criando uma harmonia entre os dois tempos, à medida que pinta uma imagem sombria da humanidade

Um livro sobre livros e uma família.

Ken Fredette says

I was reading this when I got out a book from the library due in a week. I finished the other book and went back to "Shadow". It took me a while to get the books together in my mind, but this book was special. Not because there are characters in it that make sense, but it was realistic with all the killings.

Toni Osborne says

Did you ever wonder why you had a particular book in hand? When I finally got down to reading "Shadow" I questioned why and how long it had been on my tattered wish list, and why I had put it over for so long. Now I ask myself why I waited so long to read it.

The novel is a psychological crime thriller about dark secrets, the price of fame and how the search for public approval can drive some to make unsound decisions that have lasting or tragic repercussions. It also touches the impact our childhood has on the rest of our life.

One often describes a book as hot and hard to put aside, this is surely a true description of this one. The story is one with depth, many layers and full of secrets and rivalries between the characters. As this dynamic book progresses we are plunged deep into the history of four generations of the Ragnerfeldt family and we learn more about their connection with Kristopher, the little boy abandoned yes ago. "Shadow" is a literary closet filled with skeletons of the past...

The novel begins with a brief flashback to 1975 when a boy was discovered abandoned at an amusement park with a short note seeking a better life for him. Fast forward to the present day and the plot tightens with the death of an old woman – Gerda Persson, the former housekeeper of the highly respected Nobel Laureate Axel Ragnerfeldt. With Gerda's passing a door opens into the real life of the Ragnerfeldt family, a life full of infidelity and dark secrets.....

The plot builds slowly with multiple story threads that go back and forth in time, skillfully creating a suspense that is lively and thought provoking. Each player is introduced one by one, each with their own theme and their own story building a page-turning drama only a gifted storyteller could master.

Although “Shadow” is a gripping and absorbing tale of murder, I was nevertheless disappointed with the ending, it left the fate of many characters in limbo and I wonder if the author has something up her sleeve for the future.

LitAddictedBrit says

Without wanting to appear negative, I didn't like this book much at all.

The story starts with the abandoned young boy and quickly moves to the death of Gerda Persson. The books of Nobel Prize winner Axel Ragnerfeldt are found in the freezer and so we begin.

Straight away, the characters are really difficult to like - we have a recovering alcoholic prone to wandering off into rambling social commentary (which has no relevance to the story and seems to be a way for the author to vent her views), a privileged but completely ungrateful misogynist and his worn down wife. I couldn't find sympathy for any of them - Gerda Persson sums it up perfectly: “...I'm content and you're not. You're always chasing after what you imagine you could become”. She is addressing the famous Axel himself but it could apply to all of the key characters here.

As you might have guessed, Alvtogen splits her narrative between the past and the present. I actually liked this to some extent - for example, Louise is the long-suffering wife of the borderline alcoholic and general philanderer, Jan-Erik. Through her eyes, we see general confusion at his behaviour and then we witness the actions as they happen and understand their relationship that little bit better.

However, as events pan out, this technique becomes a little worn and the story flits all over in an attempt to hastily rap everything up. And herein lies my biggest problem with this book. The “revelations” at the end of this book come thick and fast and they become rapidly more shocking. Unfortunately, not in a good way. It really is difficult to explain why I disliked this so much without massive spoilers. Let me say this: I have no problem with ‘dark’ themes in my books. What I do have a problem with are events which are so abhorrent that I can't help but feel the story is cheapened and the author is simply employing shock tactics.

And why were the books in the freezer? I still have no idea whatsoever...

Overall: This really isn't a “crime novel” as I would imagine them. Yes, there are crimes, but the book is more about the effects of the crimes than the acts themselves. I would only recommend this to adults who aren't too sensitive and aren't opposed to reading about the darker side of humanity.

Ian says

This novel is set in Stockholm and I thought it was beautifully written/translated. I came to it thinking it would be a typical Scandinavian crime novel as it begins with a death, but there is no police involvement except at the very start. It is more of a slow paced mystery but that slow pace gave time for the main characters to develop and consequently have some depth. Don't let the slow pace comment put you off. It certainly gripped my imagination and kept me interested all the way through to the end.

It begins with two seemingly unconnected events. The death of a solitary old woman and the abandonment

of a small boy in an amusement park. The only thing of note is that the dead woman has several personally dedicated first editions of the novels of the world renowned Nobel prize winning author Axel Ragnerfeldt. The plot then weaves cleverly around the Ragnerfeldt family, its past and the mysterious connections to the dead woman and the small boy. It is all well done and I really enjoyed it.

Sarah says

Kept my interest. There's quite a layered plot. Very few characters come out of it with any credit and only the character that starts it off - Marianne Folkesson - seems to get any real satisfaction in her working life sorting out the funerals of people who have nobody to do it for them after their death. We don't learn anything about her private life so it's not possible to speculate there but without exception all the other characters have a pretty dismal working life and an absolutely miserable private life. While I guess the book demonstrates that misery begets misery both in private and public there seems to be something missing - surely there must be someone somewhere in Sweden that is happy and encountered at some point in the book. I fantasize about a neighbour who mends central heating for a living - and loves it, and maybe has sister that runs a wool shop - and loves it, and whose daughter is training to be a teacher - and loves it. And maybe all the happy people are just out of sight!

Jim says

An old woman dies of natural causes in her flat in Stockholm. A social worker is dispatched to wind up her estate. As part of her job she tries to find any friends or relatives. Her diligence sparks off a series of events that with shock the whole of Sweden and will reveal just what lengths people will go to to keep up appearances.

This is not your typical crime novel in fact for most of the book no one realises that any crime (unless you count child abandonment) has even been committed. And I was not prepared for the revelation when it came.

You can read my full review on my blog [here](#).

Janika says

A four year old boy is left abandoned at the amusement park Skansen during the 70's.

In 2006 Gerda Persson, an elderly woman has died of old age, all alone in her apartment. Marianne Fredriksson is assigned to arrange the funeral, clean out the apartment and find if Gerda has any relatives to contact.

During Mariannes inspection of the apartment she finds a set of books in the freezer with dedications to Gerda from the Noble winning author Axel Ragnerfeldt. What connects these events, and why are the valuable books stored in the freezer?

Shadow is a perfect name for this novel. It's a story about Axel Ragnerfeldt, his family and people in his life living in the shadow of this beloved author. How different choices in our life reflect upon us as a human-being, how these choices will give a rippling effect and define us and the path that we follow.

Axel is a respected, well known and loved author. But what his readers and the people surrounding him

doesn't know is how troubled he is, and what secrets he is storing.

The story is told by a different person in each chapter, either Axel, his wife Alice or their son Jan-Erik and his wife amongst others.

There is no linear timeframe, and we either follow them in the present or they narrate an event in the past. All this leading up to the burial of Gerda.

I would not define this as a thriller. It does not follow a private investigator, a police or anyone solving a crime. It's not a paranormal story filled with ghost, but rather ghosts from a past. It is a psychological suspense novel, which unravels a tragic story filled with misery and pain, the pain of neglect and how something broken can continue to crack and self destruct even tho it doesn't seem to be broken. The danger of deception and fame...

All the events happening throughout the story kept me wondering why and how, what would happen next? So the story was thrilling and I really enjoyed the ending as the "mystery" unfolded with every page I read.

The main reason why I'm not giving the book more than 3 stars is because of the writing. I read it in Swedish and the first 150 pages were a drag... The authors choice of words were horrible and just felt redonculous. At times I imagined Alvtegen sitting by her computer grinning as if she thought she was writing words and sentences which would award her the Nobel Prize, as her main character once did. Or perhaps that's the problem, she tried to hard to make it sound as if it really was Axels words we were reading? This made the text flow rather poorly.

Towards the end the writing did change slightly, or perhaps I was just to eager to know the Ragnerfeldt family secret?

I do know that I won't be reading more of Karin Alvtegen's books in the future, since I was contemplating getting rid of this book after reading it...

Note. I have read this once before, back in 2007 but I couldn't remember if for my life...

Lily says

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Bill says

This was an excellent story. It lived up to my expectations as I've read other Karin Alvtegen stories and enjoyed them immensely. She develops the story very nicely, introducing characters in each chapter and telling the story through their eyes. Each person is well-crafted, has their own individual personalities, their own faults. The story starts with the death of Gerda Persson, a lady who had previously been the house maid for a famous literary family. The preparations for her funeral will change many lives and bring people together who did not know each other existed. There are many surprises and an excellent ending, even if not what I expected. Karin Alvtegen is an excellent mystery writer, very unique style. Highly recommended.

